

Highlights from the American Bar Association's Evaluation of the Foster Care Court Improvement Project

“Overall the Maryland FCCIP has achieved many great successes and has provided training, support and assistance to all of the key players in the child welfare system throughout Maryland. Based on the evaluation conducted by the ABA most of the recommendations of the 1997 Report have been achieved, but as always in the child welfare arena, there is more work to be done.” – *Executive Summary*

The ABA Review identified many of the FCCIP's accomplishments, while also suggesting positive next steps for improvement. Here are the review's highlights, with the next steps shown in italics:

Statutory and Rule Changes

Accomplishments

- ✓ Drafted and spearheaded the passage of the 2001 Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) statute which has improved child welfare practice.
- ✓ Developed Uniform Court Orders to ensure that courts are complying with state and federal laws and are implementing best practices.

Next Steps

Define basic requirements of properly conducted hearings.

Make sure the court orders are being followed and that additional training on the orders is provided for judges, masters, and attorneys.

Educational Programs and Materials

Accomplishments

- ✓ Implemented an orientation program for new judges and masters.
- ✓ Developed Child Welfare Benchbook for Judges and masters.
- ✓ Presented two day Annual Child Abuse and Neglect Judicial Conference and Judicial Institute training programs for juvenile judges and masters, for the last seven years.

Next Steps

Ensure courts conduct orientation programs.

Create a mandatory orientation program for attorneys.

Consider a wider distribution of the Benchbook.

Representation of Parties

Accomplishments

- ✓ Developed the “Guidelines of Advocacy for Attorneys Representing Children in CINA and related Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) and Adoption cases which were approved by the Court of Appeals in 2001. This has set high standards for representation of children.
- ✓ Obtained change in CINA statute to allow for representation of indigent parents regardless of custodial status.

Next Steps

Develop Uniform Standards for agency and parent's counsel.

Using recent funding, make sure more non-custodial parents are represented.

Timing of appointment of counsel for parents in TPR cases should be reviewed. The use of Shelter Care Authorization Forms that give contact information for the Office of the Public Defender should be used statewide.

Case Management and Statistical Overview

Accomplishment

- ✓ Developed the Maryland Automated Judicial Information System (MAJIC) in 1999.

Next Steps

Although the FCCIP has worked hard and made strides in developing a database system, this is an area needing much improvement. Extensive coordination between the FCCIP, JIS, and outside vendors is needed to develop a functional database system as well as developing a way to provide for quality control of data entry.

Implementation

Accomplishments

- ✓ Awarded grants for the continuation of Court Appointed Special Advocate programs.
- ✓ Organized six regional multi-disciplinary meetings throughout the state to address the Adoption and Safe Families Act regulations, two federal reviews, and best practices.

The FCCIP would like to acknowledge the time and effort of judges, masters, and other stakeholders who participated in this evaluation. We look forward to working together to implement these next steps.